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Jerry and a friend rode the Mahtomedi line every year until its abandonment in 1951. This is the Mahtomedi wye. Bob Mehlenbeck photo.



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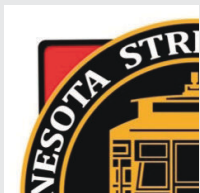
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***Jerry Olsen  
remembers the streetcars***

**-Jerry Olsen,  
with Andy Jacob and Aaron Isaacs**

At age 87, Jerry Olsen is our museum's oldest active volunteer. He was infatuated by the streetcars, was 19 when they were abandoned in 1954 and remembers them well. His grandson Andy Jacobs, also an operator and foreman at CHSL, recorded and transcribed Jerry's recollections in two sessions. Aaron Isaacs joined them for a third session which Andy transcribed.

**Everyday use**

I grew up in South Minneapolis on 45th Ave. and 39th St. Our line was the Plymouth – E. 25th St. We relied on the streetcar for many things, especially during the Second World War. We often took the streetcar to 27th Ave. and Lake St., which was a major shopping center. My mother would take us to Montgomery Ward at Snelling and University in St. Paul. We would get on the streetcar at 45th Ave. and 41st St. and take that downtown to transfer to the Minneapolis-St. Paul line. That was always a fun trip because it was a long streetcar ride. We always looked forward to that!

From our stop at 45th Ave. and 41st St., the line went a block up to 46th Ave., then turned to go south, which meant there was a blind curve where we waited. This meant we couldn't see if a car was coming, and it sometimes felt like we were waiting forever. However, there was a wooden trolley pole at our stop, and I learned that if I put my ear against the pole, I could hear if a car was coming based on the sound of the vibrations of the overhead



Above: Jerry and Andy last year at the Como-Harriet 50th anniversary. Scott Streble photo.

Left: Jerry at the controls at 4th Avenue S. and 48th Street during a 1954 MRA excursion. Jerry Olsen collection.

Front cover: In this issue Jerry Olsen takes us back in time. From his boyhood home he boarded the East 25th Street line on 41st Street in south Minneapolis. Here a southbound car turns from 42nd Avenue onto 41st Street.





depended on the streetcar for everything.

### Streetcar Adventures

I had a couple of friends who were as interested in streetcars as I was. Bob was one of my close buddies and we went everywhere together. Over the period of three summers, we rode every streetcar line in the Twin Cities. We would go on adventures. Bob knew St. Paul really well and I knew Minneapolis, though we both lived in Minneapolis, but his parents grew up in St. Paul. We started out about 9 o'clock in the morning because our mothers never let us leave before that as that was rush hour. Our mothers would pack us a lunch and we'd be out all day. Who knew where we would end up! We just rode and transferred and just had one heck of a nice time riding the streetcars.

### Selby Tunnel

The Selby Tunnel was an interesting ride. During the day, a stop or two before we entered the tunnel, the motorman would turn the lights on in the car. During the night, the lights were obviously already on. Going east, the car went downgrade towards downtown St. Paul. They had the brakes applied the entire way. They never let the car roll very fast through the tunnel. It was kept under control, and I would say, very slow. Once we got to Seven Corners, they would turn the lights back off. Going west towards Minneapolis, the car had to work to get up that grade. I don't know where they had the controller, but you could hear those gears working. They didn't go fast. At the first stop out of the tunnel, they turned the lights back off and continued the run.

Above: An eastbound Selby-Lake car exits the lower end of the tunnel.  
Below: Looking toward the west portal, the 7 percent grade is evident. Sandy Goodrick photo.



wire. If the sound got louder, I knew the car was coming. If it was getting softer, I knew we had just missed one.

I started riding the streetcar alone when I was about ten years old. I would take the streetcar from my grade school, Howe School, to downtown Minneapolis. I boarded at 42nd Ave. and 38th St. and rode it all the way downtown to Marquette and 7th to the dentist, because I wore braces in those days and I had to visit the dentist once per week to get the braces tightened. I never minded taking the streetcar. I think the streetcar ride outdid the braces! I would leave school at 3:15pm and go strictly to the streetcar stop, take the car downtown, and then return during rush hour. During the winter, that would be after dark. The cars would be packed to the doors! That's how it was in those days; we



## Mahtomedi

One of our favorite trips was the ride out to Mahtomedi on the Randolph-Hazel Park-Mahtomedi line. It turned around at the Ford Plant. The line went down West 7th St. through downtown St. Paul, out East 7th St. to White Bear Ave., where it left city streets and entered private right-of-way. On the city streets, the car made a hard, grinding noise as it travelled over the concrete. Once it left the street the ride was cushioned, and it was quiet. As the car moved along, you could hear the clickity-click, clickity-click of the wheels against the rail. I don't know how fast those cars travelled, but it was probably about 50 mph because it was out in the country. The line traveled through fields, like wheat fields. The car was moving so fast that it would make the wheat along the side of the track move out like water. When we approached a grade crossing, the motorman would blow the whistle, "tooooooot, tooooooot,

toot, toooooooooooooot" as we sped across the intersections. When we got to North St. Paul, there was an interesting stretch of track that paralleled Highway 36. It was a straight track, and then it veered slightly and traveled through a forest of evergreen trees. It was beautiful with the trees on both sides. It was like entering another world. That lasted for about a mile or two. Then we'd come out of the woods and there was a stop there so the motorman would stop. Since this was single track, some of the stops had sidings. The motorman would exit the car and enter a phone booth located next to the track, which contacted the dispatcher back in St. Paul to request permission to proceed. The dispatcher would advise the motorman as to what to do. Sometimes there was a car coming from the opposite direction that we would wait for. Once it passed, we would be on our way to Mahtomedi. Again, the car moved very fast.

Bob and I rode to Mahtomedi four

Below: After leaving North St. Paul, northbound cars traveled for a couple of blocks along Highway 36. Jim Kreuzberger photo.



Above: Just before the end of the line in Mahtomedi, streetcars crossed Hamline Lake on a S-curving fill. Jim Kreuzberger photo.

Below: In later years, most meets between cars happened at Henry Street in North St. Paul. Ed Nelson photo.





times each year: spring, summer, fall, and winter. I remember one winter ride towards the end of streetcar operation. We were north of North St. Paul and the car was moving rather slowly. I could tell the motorman was frustrated. He seemed like a nice guy so I went up and asked him why we were going so slow. With some rather "expressive" language he said, "we've been telling the dispatcher to turn on the substation. For goodness sake, there are three streetcars out here, plus a snow plow and those fools won't turn on the substation so we can go!" The voltage was low which meant the streetcars couldn't move very fast, nor could they keep their schedule, and he was very annoyed by that.

### Fort Snelling Shuttle

Another interesting line was the short shuttle out at Fort Snelling. There was a short, one-mile line within the fort, which primarily shuttled soldiers back and forth. We found out that you could ride that shuttle for free, and once we knew that, we would go out there just to ride the streetcar back and forth several times! We would ride our bicycles out to Fort Snelling, where the shuttle car met the Minnehaha cars from Minneapolis, and the cars that came from West 7th St. in St. Paul. The car assigned to that line was double-ended. When we would get to the end of the line, the motorman would get out, put one trolley pole on the wire, and take the other one off, so that the car never back-poled. However, there were several times I remember, when it was either raining or the motorman was feeling lazy, that he didn't switch the pole, and the car back-poled. The strangest thing of all: this happened two times; both poles were up at the same time! I thought that maybe the motorman had just forgotten to take



Above: Jerry took this photo of the Fort Snelling shuttle car running with both poles up. Right: Car 1300 rolls through the 6th and Hennepin intersection. Norman Rolfe photo.

the other pole down. However, several hours later, after seeing it the first time, we rode our bikes by again and he was still operating the same way. Why he chose to do that, I'll never know. Maybe he thought he could go faster with both poles!

### Car 1300

My friend Bob and I were very into the streetcar system. Like kids today have favorite baseball players and know their numbers, batting averages, etc., we knew

information on the streetcars. One of my favorite cars was 1300. There were several things that stood out about it. It was an all-electric car, which meant it had electric heat, so I was always guaranteed a warm ride in the winter. It was also a very smooth-

running car. It had a characteristic that I didn't understand when I was younger. The motorman would put the controller in about the third notch to get the car rolling. He would leave it there and the car would accelerate. Then, suddenly, the car would accelerate more, and accelerate even more without the motorman touching the controller! Later, I found out it had a shunt circuit, which shifted the gear coils on the traction motors. So, the car gained greater speed without advancing the notch. I realized some of the other cars did the same thing, but 1300 was the first car that I noticed it on. I also remember the flag brackets up in front of the car. I don't know how or when it got its brackets, but it reminded me of the cars that went out to Mahtomedi on a single track, carrying flags to let passing cars know if another car was following behind.

The last time I rode 1300 was in December of 1952. I was in the A Capella Choir at Roosevelt High





School, and all of the Minneapolis schools were invited to sing with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra at Northrup Auditorium on the University of Minnesota campus. Everyone had to be down there around six o'clock in the evening. I had to take the streetcar over there alone. Around 5:30, I walked to the corner to catch the car, and along came 1300. Its destination sign read "East Side Station," so I knew I could take it to Seven Corners, where I could transfer to the Minneapolis-St. Paul line. That was the last time I rode 1300 in regular service. I remember 1300 vividly through the years. So, when it turned out 1300 was being operated by the Minnesota Transportation Museum, I was thrilled! I remember the first time I rode 1300 at the museum was before the overhead wire was put up and they were pulling a power generator behind the car. It was very emotional because when I got on the car, I could hear the air compressor running, a sound that was imbedded in my brain. Then the car began to move. I could hear the gears and I could feel the motors take hold, and I have to admit that I had a tear in my eye, a happy tear.

### Owl service

During the summer of my sophomore year of high school, I worked at the El Lago movie theater at 36th Ave. and Lake St. Part of my job was to change the letters on the marquee at the end of the day, which meant I left around 11:30pm at night. I would go over to the streetcar line and take the streetcar home. People are creatures of habit. Many times, the same motorman would run the same time schedule each night, and often, the same passengers were on board. A couple of times, we'd get to 42nd Ave. or so and



Jerry worked the evening shift at the El Lago Theater at 36th Avenue S. and Lake Street, where the East 25th Street and Selby-Lake lines crossed. John Stern photo, Electric Railroaders Association collection.

the car would stop. No one signaled to get off, but the car stopped and the motorman got up from his seat, walked back to the middle of the car and gently nudged a man's shoulder, saying, "John, John, this is your stop." In the summer, with the windows

open and the warm breeze blowing throughout the car, it would have been easy to fall asleep.

### Charters

When I was growing up and we were going on a school trip, the school

chartered streetcars for our travel. This happened a lot, especially in grade school. I attended Howe Grade School. To catch the streetcar, we walked a block over to 42nd Ave. and 38th St. We traveled all over the city on school outings. One time, we went to the





Jerry attended Roosevelt High School, where students boarded the 34th Avenue S. line on 28th Avenue at 40th Street.

University farm. That trip was all by streetcar, including onto the farm campus on the chartered car. Three times each year, the Minneapolis Symphony put on youth concerts on Thursday afternoons. We were excused from school, and they always chartered streetcars to bring us to the performances.

One of the most memorable charters took place when I was in senior high school. I attended Roosevelt High School, and in those days, football games were played on Friday afternoons. One Friday, Roosevelt was scheduled to play at Patrick Henry up on the north side of Minneapolis. The school chartered three streetcars to take the students up to the game. The cars were packed to the doors with high school students. We made it to the game without incident. I couldn't tell you any details about the football game itself. The ride back wasn't as smooth. It should be said that the trolley pole very rarely came off the wire all by itself. We traveled a few blocks

on our way back to south Minneapolis, and the trolley de-wired. The motorman stopped the car and did his motorman duty by getting off the car and putting the trolley back on the wire. He got back on, and we continued our journey. However, two blocks later, the same thing happened again. This time, the motorman took a different approach to the situation. Without ever turning around, he reached over to his lunch box, and poured himself a cup of coffee from his thermos. We sat there for several minutes before the chaos of a fully packed car began to calm. There were murmurs of, "Isn't he going to put the pole back up?" and, "Why is he just sitting there?" Pretty soon the car became silent. And then, all of sudden, the lights came back on and the air compressor started humming. However, the motorman was in no hurry. He continued to sit up in his seat drinking his coffee. When he finished and was ready to go, he released the brakes, and we were off. We made the rest of the eleven-mile

trip home with no incident.

### A comforting sound

My brother and I had bedrooms upstairs. In the summer it got kind of hot, so we always had the windows open at night. I remember a very comforting sound of trains going over the Short Line bridge over the Mississippi River. We could hear them because they were steam engines. They would puff along and once they got into St. Paul, you could really hear them start to huff and puff as they started up the grade. That was a comforting sound. It wasn't something that kept you awake. It gave you a sense that everything was okay.

Another sound was the streetcars operating. There were two curves near us. One was at 41st St. and 42nd Ave. and the other was at 46th Ave and 41st St. These were sharp curves. This usually happened in the summer when it was hot; when the cars went around

the curve, the wheels would sing as they made it around the curve. Once they made it to straight track, everything was quiet again. It took me a while to figure out where this sound was coming from, but I could hear a streetcar in the distance traveling rather fast. Then, it dawned on me that it was Minnehaha Ave. Minnehaha Ave. was a wide avenue, as it is today, and it had the streetcar line running on it. I think at times I heard the streetcars from St. Paul across the river on the Randolph-Hazel Park line or the St. Clair-Payne, where the streetcars were met with a grade, and you could hear the gears singing and pulling up the hill. This would be at like 2am and my ears were tuned into that sort of thing. Again, that was a comforting sound.

### A family affair

When my Uncle Wally was discharged from the Army after World War II, his first job back home was as a



This is the curve from 42nd Avenue onto 41st Street, which included a wye. Bob Schumacher photo.





Jerry's Uncle Wally the motorman let him back the car into this wye at 27th and Yale Street SE, the end of the Oak Street line. Bob Selle photo.

motorman. He was assigned to East Side Station, and from that station, the Oak-Harriet line. One Sunday afternoon in about 1949, I rode with him on his run. I got on at 50th and Penn and we went on the private right-of-way to 31st St., to Hennepin Ave., through downtown Minneapolis, and ended up over on 4th St. SE, where the Oak-Harriet line diverged. It wye'd in a remote, industrial area. I saw my uncle look around in all directions before he said, "Okay, do you want to back the car up?" I said, "Sure, I'd be happy to back the car up!" So, we put the controller in the first notch and walked to the back of the car where he showed me the two switches and the air brake. He told me to go between the "on" and

"off" switches to keep the car moving at a slow speed. We backed around the corner onto the wye. He told me when to apply the brakes and we stopped. That was my first time driving a streetcar.

My grandpa Olsen was a motorman for the streetcar company, too. He wasn't a motorman for too long, maybe only four or five years. This was back around 1900. His route was the Minneapolis-St. Paul line, probably when University Ave. was still a mud street and filled with horses and wagons. He was a sort of jack-of-all-trades. He was on the crew that dug the Selby Tunnel and the crews that worked on the footings of the old Lake St. and Washington Ave. bridges.

### Tar roads

Another interesting remembrance was that in the summer, the city of Minneapolis plowed and graded all the tar streets. Whenever they graded roads that had a streetcar line, they would dig up both sides, grade it, lay oil, and pack it down. The result was that the streetcar tracks were filled with tar. At night, it was fun watching the cars travel along those sections of track because there was a continuous blue arc that would take place between the wheels and the rails. It usually stayed that way for a day or two before all of that was worn off by the streetcar traffic.

### Bicycle accident

Somebody was being careless when they were riding their bicycle. This happened to one of my neighbor friends. He was riding his bicycle down the alley, fast, and he shot out the end of the alley, across 41st St., and right onto the cowcatcher of a streetcar. His head hit the headlight which shattered the glass, and he ended up unceremoniously on the cowcatcher along with his bicycle. The car was moving right along. It probably went another 25 or 30 feet before it stopped, but there he was, on the basket! Miracle of miracles, he had only a few scratches and he walked home.

### Charters to Northrup Auditorium

There were charters where the Minneapolis Public Schools, and probably St. Paul, too, chartered streetcars to take students to Northrup Auditorium. Many of them arrived on Washington Ave. between the student union and Northrup, where they discharged the students. After the concert, the cars would come back and pick us up. Our chaperones would keep us in tight groups and keep us moving towards Washington Ave. because the streetcars had to keep moving. Remember, that was on the Minneapolis-St. Paul line, a very heavily traveled line. You'd end up with 10, 15, 20 chartered cars that had to be intermeshed with the regular revenue runs. I don't know how they ever did that, to keep those Minneapolis-St. Paul cars going with that obstacle there.

### Winter storm

In the March of either 1949 or 1950 we had a heavy winter storm. There was a lot of snow, a lot of sleet, a lot of slush, and a lot of ice! What ended up



happening was that automobiles were compacting snow into the flangeways of the track which quickly turned to ice. At 42nd Ave. and 36th St., along came a streetcar, and it derailed due to ice in the flangeways. They brought in busses to continue service to the Ford Plant, which only made matters worse, because the busses packed the snow down even more than the cars! This derailment happened in the afternoon. The motorman stayed with his car until the streetcar company came and got it back on the track. Later that evening, a streetcar snowplow came along with the goal of clearing the flangeways. The way they went about it was that the plow car would get a running start and push its way through the ice, maybe 10 or 12 feet, before it derailed. The work crew would get it back on the track using a whole variety of methods, and do the same thing again. They inched their way along using the same method repeatedly until they opened 42nd Ave. They had a standard car follow the snowplow about a block behind, running back and forth to keep the flangeways clear.

#### Streetcar vs. truck

One summer afternoon, I was over at my friend's house. He lived at 44th Ave. and 39th St. A truck went by ridiculously fast. It was like a produce truck, a heavy truck. It was going way too fast. Suddenly, we heard a loud crash. Two blocks down is where the streetcar ran, on 41st St. at 44th Ave., this truck broadsided a streetcar going south to the Ford Plant. The truck ran into the front part of streetcar and knocked the front trucks off the track. The car must have been going along fairly fast because it veered off towards the sidewalk, cut through the cement curb, the boulevard, and up



Above: A plow works through a typical residential neighborhood. Steven D. Maguire photo.

Below: This is the corner of 41st Street and 44th Avenue S., where Jerry frequently boarded streetcars near his home. Bob Selle photo.





onto a lawn, before it stopped. What was interesting was watching the streetcar company put that car back on the track again. There was damage to the car, but they were able to pull it back on the track with the help of a work car. The car was disabled and couldn't travel under its own power, so they called in another streetcar to tow it back to the station. Everything was cleaned up in about two or three hours, and service was resumed.

### All in a day's work

I was making a transfer on Cedar and Lake one afternoon during rush hour, and a streetcar was turning from Cedar onto Lake, heading west, when the trolley de-wired. That was a heavy crossover intersection of tracks and wires. For some reason or another, the retriever rope got tangled up there with the pole and the wire. The wheel was no longer on the wire, but the pole was scraping along, causing arcing, which eventually burned the rope and sent the pole flying up. This also meant the motorman couldn't use it to get the wheel back on the wire. So, he took it upon himself to climb up on the roof of the car and take hold of the pole to put the trolley back on the wire. He climbed down and continued his run.

### The Washington Avenue viaduct

The Washington Avenue viaduct near the Milwaukee Road depot was dangerous because they only had screens on the pole side of the car. If you put your head out at the wrong time, you could have been decapitated. I mean, that's how close it was. But, you know, I never remember anyone getting hurt. I never saw any writeup about it. However, the motorman sometimes looked in their mirrors as we approached to make sure no one was hanging out. I never heard them



Above: At Cedar Avenue, the Selby-Lake line crossed the 28th Avenue and 34th Avenue lines. Wilbur Whittaker photo.  
Below: Clearances were tight under the Washington Avenue viaduct. Bob Schumacher photo.





say anything. I rode through that viaduct a number of times.

### Streetcars on the street

The streetcars were driven aggressively in the Twin Cities. They really did move out. I'm remembering West 7th Street in St. Paul from about Lexington to Fort Snelling. In those days, that was open country. There were woods on one side, which led down to the river. The streetcars really used to go fast along that section of track, both day and night. I don't know how fast they actually got rolling, but it was faster than 30 mph. They were moving!

The same thing was true on Lake St. I'm remembering during rush hour, they really tried to keep the streetcars moving. One thing they didn't do was go slowly over the crossovers, making sure the controller was off when going across the overhead switches to prevent arcing. They would crank the controller up and the sparks would fly across the wire switches. In some cases, they'd even take copper off the trolley wheel, and it would spin down to the ground. They drove very aggressively in order to keep their schedules. Once they got east of 36th Ave., between there and the river, both day and night, they really moved out in excess of 30 mph.

University Ave. was a hot spot when the new PCCs arrived. The guys in my class at school were always talking about automobiles. One of the guy's dads had an Oldsmobile 88 and it was considered by the kids to be a very hot car – good for drag racing. They used to go over to University Ave. and drag race the PCCs. This one guy who used to do that would say, "We thought it would piece of cake. Once we'd get alongside that PCC, we'd just floor it. To our amazement, the PCC pulled



Above: As rebuilt in 1948 with safety islands and PCC cars, University Avenue in St. Paul was fast, the next thing to light rail. Below: The State Fair terminal, viewed from the west side of the Minneapolis loop and yard. The outbound shelter is at left.

away from us!" The PCC's acceleration was just that good.

### State Fair

My family would take the streetcar to the fair. We would get on the Plymouth-E. 25th St. car to 36th and Lake, transfer to a Selby-Lake car and ride that to Snelling Ave., then take the Snelling crosstown line to the main entrance of the fairgrounds. However, we took a different route home. After the Grandstand show and the fireworks, we'd head out to the car yards, where there would be cars waiting to go anywhere in Minneapolis or St. Paul. However, we found it faster to take a Como-Harriet car which was diverted through the fairgrounds during the fair, instead of waiting for a car bound directly for our neighborhood. We took the Como-Harriet car to 5th





and Hennepin, where we'd then take the Plymouth-E. 25th car home. It was kind of a nice ride at night in the late summer. I enjoyed those rides with my family. We'd leave the fair around 10:30 or 11pm and get home about an hour later. I used to say to my dad, "Wow, the cars sure move fast, don't they?" He would reply, "Yeah, they just make up their own schedule at night."

### Substations

My friends and I used to go look at the substations. They had a substation on 27th and Lake with the large rotary converters in there. Just after the Second World War, they increased the capacity of that substation quite a bit. I think they put in an additional rotary converter. We used to stop by there

and look in through the door. They always had a chain across the door so you couldn't go in. We watched the maintenance men operate the rotary converters and occasionally, he'd kind of dress down the commutators with a long stick with some carbon on it, which would lubricate the commutators. The station was always warm, and, in the winter, the door was always open with just a chain across it. I think there was sufficient heat from those rotary converters to keep the substation warm. They had a substation on Chicago and Lake. Another one we used to go to was on Hope St. in St. Paul, just off 7th St. There were a couple others that we never got to, but we often checked on those to see how things were going.

Speaking of substations, I had a



Above right: The Chicago-Lake substation. Norton & Peel photo, MHS collection.  
Below right: A 28th Avenue car approaches the end of the line at 56th Street, notorious among motormen for low power that slowed the cars.



friend who lived out on about 56th St. and 28th Ave. That was a long way out and the end of the line (28th Ave. S. - Robbinsdale) was kind of out in the country. There was a farmer who lived out there who had a wagon and a sleigh. When I was in Scouts, we would take the streetcar out to his farm and go on wagon and sleigh rides. My friend who lived out there said he would always get kind of frustrated because at night during rush hour, there could be three or four cars out there and the cars would drag along slowly because the voltage was so low. Even back in those days, I was interested in power distribution. I know for a fact that the last feeder was on about 50th and 28th which meant there was about a mile to the end of the line with no feeders. At night, with three or four cars out there, the motor-



man would crank the controller and the lights would dim way down and the car just crawled. Why Twin City Lines ever did that, we'll never know. My friend and I could never figure that out. That was the only line I know of that had such a long stretch between a feeder and the end of the line. The company was so good at everything else! They just never put the feeder all the way out.

### **Derailment**

This happened towards the end of operations when things were falling apart. 25th St. was a tar road, and it was famous for potholes. The rails there were all zig-zaggy. How they ever kept a car on the tracks along there, I'll never know! They wobbled all over the place. One time, they had a derailment that was really bad. It blocked the line so they couldn't move cars through in either direction. The streetcar company knew it was going to be a while to improve the tracks enough to run the cars until the end of operations. So, they did some minor, temporary repairs, which took about a week and a half.

So, what did they do? They couldn't run the cars between 36th and Lake, and Riverside Ave. However, they still had through service. Once the cars hit Lake St. going north, they turned west on Lake St. There was no westbound to northbound track to access the Minnehaha line at 27th Avenue, so we continued to the Lake St. station. They had cleared a track through the Lake St. station yard that it could loop through, come back to Lake St., and then head west on Lake St. to a connection onto 27th Ave. and take that to Riverside and Cedar where they resumed the line. So, whenever we had to go someplace, we got to take that extra ride through the car yards.

### **A quick fix**

One of my trips downtown happened during summer vacation. I got the streetcar at 41st St. and 45th Ave. I noticed that the trolley retriever rope was dragging on the street behind the car. It didn't seem to bother the motorman, though he clearly knew about it because when we got to 36th and Lake, there was a shop man with a retriever in his arms. We stopped to pick up passengers and the stop light was red for us. The guy ripped the old retriever off, put the new one on, took the rope, climbed up on the roof, attached the rope to the trolley wheel, and he was back on the sidewalk by the time the light turned green! I thought that was pretty amazing.

### **Paper route**

During the summers, I delivered papers for the Minneapolis Daily Times. I was a substitute for the regular delivery guys. When they were on vacation, I would take their routes. We picked our papers up on 42nd Ave. and 38th St. The paper truck would just throw them out on the curb. They didn't have a paper shack or anything, they'd just throw them in a bundle on the curb and we'd pick our papers, fold them, and deliver them. Sometimes we were short papers. The way we handled that was that we would call the paper company and let them know how many we were short. They were located on 5th St. and about Marquette or so. The Plymouth line ran right in front of their door. They would put the papers on the streetcar, and we would pick them up from the motorman at 42nd and 38th. It was pretty efficient; we wouldn't have to wait very long. They usually had them to us within 30 or 40 minutes.

### **A rough ride**

Around Christmas time, I worked in the mail order department at Sears Roebuck at Lake and Chicago. I took the Selby-Lake line home during rush hour and those cars were always packed. That was a heavily traveled line. When I got on, people were laughing, which I thought was interesting. As soon as the car started, I realized why. People started yelling, "Here we go again!" The operator only knew "on" and "off." The controller was either all the way on, or it was off. Everyone was pushed back in their seats! When it came to the brakes, the car was either going 30 mph, or it was stopped dead, and everyone would fall forward and start laughing. Every time we started up again, people would again say, "Here we go again!" That happened continuously until I got off at 36th and Lake.

### **Q&A**

Aaron Isaacs joined Jerry and Andy for a question and answer session at the carbarn.

Aaron: When you were riding the cars, what were the bell signals you heard?

Jerry: On Selby-Lake, you'd hear the conductor ring twice when he wanted the back doors closed. Then sometimes, you'd hear one ring, and the doors would open back up. Maybe he changed his mind. I got to know those signals well. A couple of times when I was riding a one-man car during the winter and the car was packed, the motorman opened the back doors to let people on or off, and he'd just leave them open at the stop while he was still collecting fares in front. It got cold in the car! All the business had moved to the front of the car, the doors didn't



A Selby-Lake car crosses the Chicago Avenue line, with the Sears store, now the Midtown Exchange and Global Market, looming in the background. Bob Selle photo.



need to be open any more. So, I would ring the bell twice, "ding-ding"... and the doors would close! I didn't think anything would happen. How could the motorman trust anyone on the car? I did that several other times along the trip. Then, somebody came along who wanted to get on, so I rang the bell once, and the doors opened! I never saw the motorman and he never saw me because the car was so full.

A: When you rode with a conductor, did the motorman acknowledge with a bell or did he just go?

J: No, he just went. On the Lake Street and Chicago lines, they ran a lot of gate cars. At wyes they had the conductor in back and he had one hand on the bell chord signaling to the motorman when he should go or what to do for backing into the wye.

A: We've got video footage of a rail fan trip where Ed Nelson backs into a wye from the front of the car instead of the back. Did you ever see that?

J: No, I never saw a motorman back in from the front of the car. He would pull out his key to open the rear control box, and then back in.

A: I'm trying to find pocket timetables for the collection. It's unclear to me how available they were. Do you recall seeing them or using them?

J: Yes, I remember seeing them on the car and using them. They weren't super available.

A: You probably remember the frequency. Wasn't the 25th St. line every 20 minutes?

J: During the day it was about every 20 minutes. In the evening, it picked up quite a bit. Frequently, I don't know why, three cars would come together, especially coming from downtown during rush hour. People would use to say, "I wait on the corner forever and then three come right together!"

A: You rode out to the Ford Plant. Did you ever transfer the Randolph



Chatsworth Street, the bottom of the 3/4-mile Randolph Avenue hill.

car to go to St. Paul?

J: You would have to pay another fare to get on the St. Paul car. We did that a couple of times. To get to St. Paul, we'd often take the Plymouth line to Seven Corners and transfer to a Minneapolis-St. Paul car. I was into the maps when I was younger. They were in the phone books, and I knew the Minneapolis and St. Paul lines by heart. At any rate, I said to my mom when we were going over to St. Paul, "why don't we take the car to the Ford Plant." She had never thought of that. So, we went out to the Ford Plant and transferred to the Randolph car to St. Paul.

A: There's a big hill on Randolph east of Hamline Avenue and I've always wondered what the performance was like on that hill.

J: Well, I rode that hill many times when we'd go out to Mahtomedi. They worked to get up that hill. I can't tell you the speed. They cranked the controller and I'm sure they got rolling at 25 or 30 mph if they had the chance to leave it on for a long time.

A: I want to ask you about track

switches. Which ones do you remember being electric vs. spring vs. hand throw?

J: Starting off in my neighborhood, 41st St and 42nd Ave, there was a wye there and that was a spring-loaded switch. I could tell which way the car was going. When it was going south, it would hit that switch and it would snap back.

A: Just like ours at Lake Harriet.

J: Yes, except that one was more musical. Ours is just a loud "snap!" That one had quality to it! It was kind of a hollow sound and it carried.

A: I'm assuming most of the wye switches were spring switches.

J: Yes.

A: When it was an electric switch, how did the motorman control it?

J: It seemed to me that if they wanted to change the direction of the switch, they would approach with the power on. To go straight they coasted through with the controller off. I have to tell you one other thing about the switch. People were savvy when they rode the streetcars. When there was standing water in the streets, and elec-

tric switches changed, water would shoot up! People were savvy enough to know that they shouldn't stand near that switch because they didn't know if it would snap or not.

A: Did you very often see a motorman pry over a switch by hand?

J: Yes, they did it from inside the car 9 times out of 10. They had those two switch rod holes in front, and they had switch rod poles on both sides. You could see the pole hanging maybe 2 feet above the street, so they didn't have to drop it very far.

A: Did they ever get out of the car and pry it over with the short switch rod?

The spring switch at 41st Street and 42nd Avenue S. Bob Schumacher photo.





J: I can only remember a couple times when they'd do it from outside the car. I rode those cars all the time. They did everything from inside. They were pretty good at lining up. They would approach slow, sometimes they'd have to give a little power to line up perfectly. They were good. Another thing they were really good at, many of them chewed tobacco when they got out towards the end of the line, and they could spit right through the switch rod hole.

A: Do you remember the starters that would be on street corners?

J: Yes, because the corner I used a lot was 5th and Hennepin. There was a shack right there with a starter in there. I remember seeing them give signals to the cars. I remember seeing them more in St. Paul than Minneapolis.

A: How warm or not warm were the cars in the winter?

J: That's a good question. I preferred to ride the good old standard cars in

the winter because they were warmer than the PCCs. The PCCs were cold! They had that big door in the front, and that big door in the middle, and both doors would fling open in -10-degree weather, and it took a long time to overcome it. For that reason, I avoided the PCCs if I could on lines that ran both cars and they were running soon enough. In my opinion, they weren't nearly as comfortable as the old standard cars.

A: Do you remember any part of the car being warmer? Did it vary based on where you sat?

J: My favorite place to sit was the middle of the car on the sidewalk side because that's where the coal fire furnace was under the floor and the floor right there was warm. I learned that early on. Once during rush hour on my way back from the dentist, there was a seat open on the front peanut row right near the front door and no one was sitting there. No one seemed to want to take it. So, I took it. I had all



That squarish metal duct just behind the right front bulkhead channeled heat from the resistors into the streetcar. Jerry discovered it was too hot to sit there.

my winter clothes on. I was there about 10 minutes then I got up too because that's where that heat vent is and your back is right against it, it was too hot!

A: The vent caught the heat off the resistors.

J: Yes.

A: Do you recall fumes in the car?

J: Yes, it smelled terrible. It was a mixture of coal fumes and cigarette smoke. It was bad.

A: You know that car 1300 and 60 or so other cars were all-electric heat. Were you aware of that in the winter and how did they compare?

J: Yes, my remembrance is that the all-electric heat cars were more stable for heat. A coal fire could be hot at one point of the line, and it could be going out by the time it reached another point on the line but the electric heat is always on.

A: Were they warmer or not as

warm?

J: I'll put it this way: they were generally more comfortable. I was never disappointed. I never felt cold or uncomfortable on an electrically heated streetcar. On a coal fired car, every now and then it got cold. My uncle drove the streetcars and he had a lot of night runs. I used to see him get ready to go to work and he'd have foot gear on like you'd never believe, and he still froze his feet. It was cold up there.

A: You have a picture of them stoking the fire at the Ford Plant loop, so you obviously saw them do that.

J: Yes, on the Plymouth-East 25th line they had a coal bin at the Ford Plant and the other one was on 41st St. and 42nd Ave. I used to see them come in there and stoke the fire and clean the grates because they had an ash bin there too. Sometimes, the motorman would come in there and he'd load up with coal but I think he was only going



Motorman Ed Nelson demonstrates how to pry over a switch from within the car using the long switch rod. Bob Schumacher photo.



as far as the 45th St. wye. He wasn't going all the way to the Fort Plant so he had to do his business there.

A: When it was cold in the winter, how bad did the windows fog up?

J: They fogged up. I sometimes wonder how that motorman ever saw where he was going but they did put on those frost shields. They put some of them on the folding doors too.

A: Did you go around to any of the carhouses?

J: We didn't intentionally go around. I was familiar with the Duluth carhouse and of course the Lake Street station. That's where my cars came from. I would observe them working under the cars in the pit.

A: Did you ever go into the station or onto the grounds at all?

J: Only once did I ever do that. My friend and I went to Snelling Station towards the end of operations. You weren't supposed to be on that property, and being good kids, we always obeyed the law...most of the time! This one time, we couldn't resist because we knew the end was near. So, we were rummaging around where the cars had been tipped over and getting ready for burning and I got hold of a roll sign out of a lightweight car and got that home. Otherwise, we never roamed around in the yards.

A: Did you ever ride the filtration plant railway?

J: No, I never did but I had been by there several times and observed them a lot of times. They took passengers on that but I was never a passenger. My friend and I would ride our bikes up there just to observe their operation and watch them move the cars around or whatever they were doing.

A: Do you recall leaves making tracks slippery in the fall?

J: Yes, I remember that. Those leaves were greasy, and they were wet. I

remember the cars would skid on them but nothing that would have caused an accident because they had those cars under control.

A: Do you remember seeing the snowplows in action?

J: Yes, the thing that was really aggravating to me, and I'm sure it was even more aggravating to the streetcar company was when cars would park on the street. That was bad. That was a headache for the streetcar company.

A: Did you ever see the portable track switches that they could move around?

J: No, I didn't see that. But the fire engines had a little slot for hose bridge they could over the track so the cars could continue running. There was a fire in a house near our house and the fire department pulled that hose bridge out and but it across the tracks because they were there for quite a while and the streetcar ran over it. There was a major fire in downtown Minneapolis. I don't remember the year, but it was near the heart of Hennepin Ave. There were a couple of buildings that were on fire. They put out these bridges, called hose jumpers, so the streetcar could keep running. All other traffic was blocked off. They went over a serious of hose bridges for maybe a week. It was a long time because they kept watering that building down.

A: Did you ever see a motorman operate the brake with his knee with his foot was on the footrest projecting out from the fare box support?

J: Oh, yes. They did that quite often, especially when they were dealing with fares. When they were at a stop, they tried to use as little air as possible. They wouldn't apply the brakes 100%. They'd use enough air to get the car to stop and then put their knee up to hold the brake there when handing out transfers, etc.



See that footrest protruding from under the farebox? 1300 has one. It was added to all the streetcars about 1945 at the request of the motormen. With your right foot on it you could hold the brake lever open with your knee, freeing your hands to do other stuff. Some motormen actually learned to stop the car using their knee.

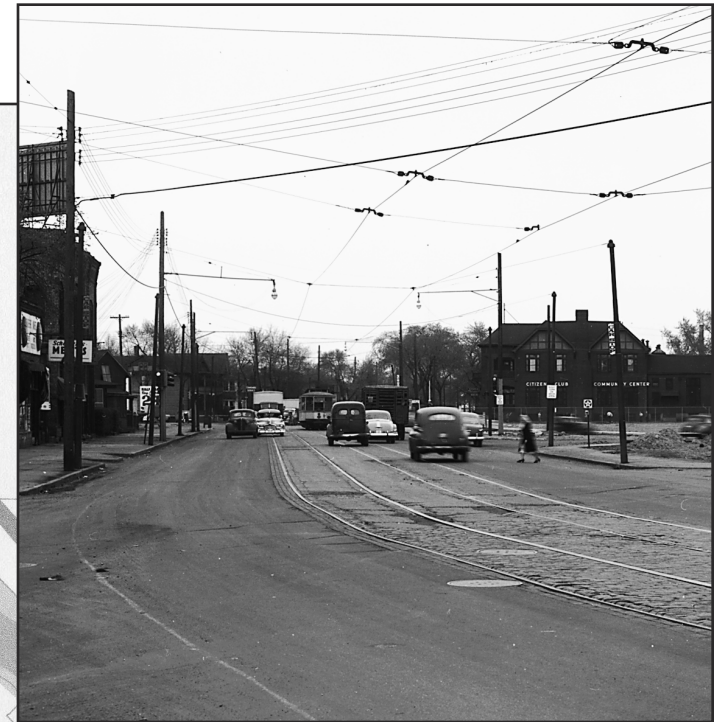
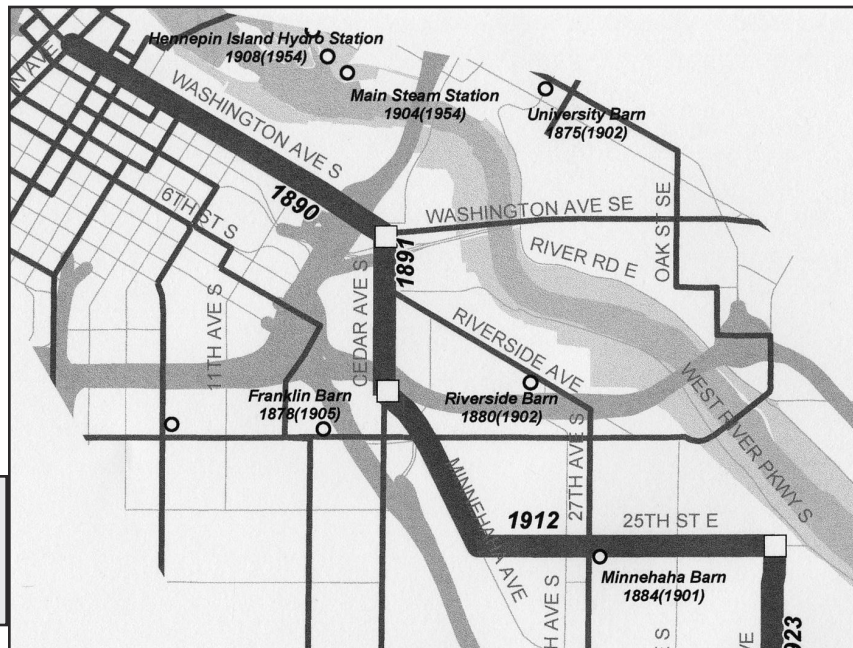




## The East 25th Street Line

Jerry Olsen lived on the East 25th Street line, which zig-zagged through the neighborhood between Hiawatha Avenue and the Mississippi River. Here's a photo tour of the line.

Below: Looking north on Minnehaha Avenue at 22nd Street. Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.



Above: A block north of Franklin Avenue, the East 25th Street line angled onto Minnehaha Avenue. Norton & Peel photo. Minnesota Historical Society collection.







The wye at 45th Street and 46th Avenue S. Jerry Olsen photo.



Looking east on 41st Street from 44th Avenue S.



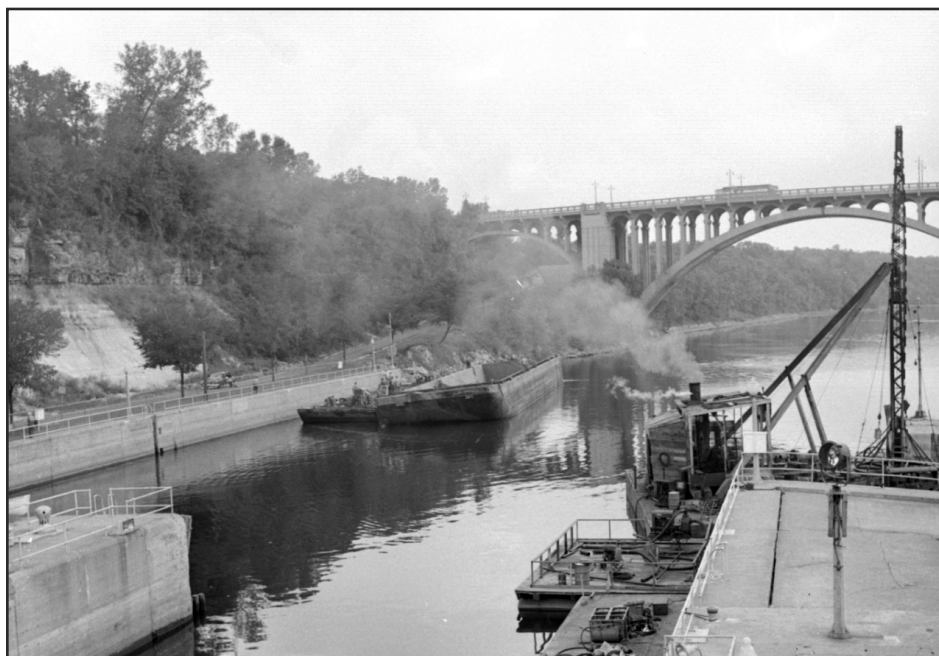


The Ford Bridge opened in 1927 and the East 25th Street line was extended across it to the Ford Plant.

Left: Exiting the St. Paul end of the bridge.

Below left: The bridge viewed from Lock and Dam #1. Star-Tribune photo, Minnesota Historical Society collection.

Below right: The motorman stokes the underfloor heater with coal at the Ford Plant loop. Jerry Olsen photo.







We continue to follow the East 25th Street line from downtown to the Ford Plant with color photos. This is 5th Street at Hennepin Avenue.



Passing City Hall on 5th Street between 3rd and 4th Avenues S. 5th Street was shared with the University Avenue line to St. Paul.





The East 25th Street line passed under the Milwaukee Road's Short Line on 36th Avenue S.



The largest transfer point on the East 25th Street line was Lake Street.





The East 25th Street line was extended across the new Ford Bridge to the Ford Plant in 1927. There it met the Randolph Avenue car to downtown St. Paul. Peterson-Krambles Archive.





Some East 25th Street line cars shortlined at this wye on 46th Avenue S. at 45th Street. This view looks north. Note the spring switch set for the wye at right. This is what Jerry refers to as a "tar street". It was actually dirt, saturated each year with oil and compacted.





# MINNESOTA STREETCAR MUSEUM

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